

# Depression and exercise

## What is depression?

Depression is a common, potentially debilitating condition characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure and feelings of guilt or low self worth. Depression may also manifest as disturbances in sleep, concentration, appetite, or as persistent fatigue (1).

Symptoms of depression may occur alone, or concurrently with chronic illness, such as diabetes, or subsequent to chronic injury. For example, the prevalence of comorbid diabetes and moderate to severe depression in Australia is between 22% and 35% (2). Major depression is also associated with an increased likelihood of early mortality, primarily due to cardiometabolic disease (3).

## Why is physical activity or exercise important in the management of depression?

People who undertake regular physical activity or exercise, even at very low levels, are less likely to experience symptoms of depression and are less likely to experience future depressive episodes (4,5). Exercise has a moderate clinical effect on depressive symptoms and may be as effective as psychological or pharmaceutical therapies (6) for some individuals. Physical activity and exercise is also effective in reducing symptoms of depression for people experiencing other mental disorders (7). Perhaps more importantly, regular physical activity and exercise are well-established strategies for weight management, improving diabetes control and reducing the impact of cardiovascular disease that often occurs in mental illness including depression (8).

## What type of exercise might be beneficial for people with depression?

A recent systematic review (9) concluded that supervised aerobic exercise which is similar to that recommended for the general population (10) is likely to be beneficial for people with depression. This is summarised below.

Frequency	Intensity	Time	Type	Supervision	Setting
3-4 times weekly	Low – moderate or patient-preferred	30-40 minutes	Any aerobic activity	Appropriately trained and qualified personnel	Group or individual

Ideally, exercise participation should be ongoing; however, a minimum program length of 9 weeks is suggested.



## How do I commence an exercise program?

Talk to your treating specialist about an exercise program that suits your personal preferences and circumstances. They may refer you to an Accredited Exercise Physiologist, who has specialised training in the design and delivery of exercise and lifestyle interventions for people with chronic and complex conditions including depression.

## References and further information

Exercise is Medicine Australia [www.exerciseismedicine.org.au](http://www.exerciseismedicine.org.au)

Find an Accredited Exercise Physiologist [www.essa.org.au](http://www.essa.org.au)

Exercise Right [www.exerciseright.com.au](http://www.exerciseright.com.au)

1. WHO. (2014). Depression: definition Retrieved 7 May, 2014, from <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/noncommunicable-diseases/pages/news/news/2012/10/depression-in-europe/depression-definition>
2. Speight, J., Browne, J. L., Holmes-Truscott, E., Hendrieckx, C., & Pouwer, F. (2011). on behalf of the Diabetes MILES – Australia reference group (2011). Diabetes MILES – Australia 2011 Survey Report. Canberra: Diabetes Australia.
3. Marazziti, D., Rutigliano, G., Baroni, S., Landi, P., & Dell'Osso, L. (2013). Metabolic Syndrome and Major Depression. *CNS Spectrums*, FirstView, 1-12
4. Mammen, G., & Faulkner, G. (2013). Physical Activity and the Prevention of Depression: A Systematic Review of Prospective Studies. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 45(5), 649-657
5. Stanton, R., Happell, B., & Reaburn, P. (in press). The Mental Health Benefits of Regular Physical Activity, and its Role in Preventing Future Depressive Episodes. *Nursing: Research and Reviews*
6. Cooney, G. M., Dwan, K., Greig, C. A., Lawlor, D. A., Rimer, J., Waugh, F. R., Mead, G. E. (2013). Exercise for Depression. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 9, CD004366
7. Rosenbaum, S., Tiedemann, A., Sherrington, C., Curtis, J., & Ward, P. B. (2014). Physical Activity Interventions for People With Mental Illness: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 10.4088/JCP.13r08765
8. Berk, M., Sarris, J., Coulson, C. E., & Jacka, F. N. (2013). Lifestyle Management of Unipolar Depression. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 127(Suppl. 443), 38-54
9. Stanton, R., & Reaburn, P. (2013). Exercise and the Treatment of Depression: A Review of the Exercise Program Variables. *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 17(2), 117-182
10. Garber, C. E., Blissmer, B., Deschenes, M. R., Franklin, B. A., Lamonte, M. J., Lee, I.-M., Swain, D. P. (2011). Quantity and Quality of Exercise for Developing and Maintaining Cardiorespiratory, Musculoskeletal, and Neuromotor Fitness in Apparently Healthy Adults: Guidance for Prescribing Exercise. *Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise*, 43(7), 1334-1359

